

LONG, (J. D.)

TREATMENT OF THE
INSANE.



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[Extracts from the Inaugural Address of His Excellency, Hon. John D. Long, Governor of Mass., delivered at the State House, Boston, Jan. 6, 1881.]

With regard to all our public institutions for the insane, the convict, or the poor, penal and charitable alike, their officers, trustees, and supervising boards are intent upon their duty, and laboring to render the best service. The only criticism is, that sometimes, in their very real and consciousness of devotion to their trusts, they are sensitive to supervision as if it involved invasion of their jurisdiction. It must never be forgotten that the sole persons whose rights are in danger of being overlooked, or whose interests are the one ultimate consideration, are the inmates themselves, the convicts in the prisons and jails, the insane in the hospitals, the paupers in the almshouses. The one vital thing is inspection and full exposure to the public eye. I should not do justice, however, if I, a witness now for two years of the faithful labors of the various officials charged with the supervision and management of our public institutions, did not remind you of the good service they render the Commonwealth, many of them without pay and at personal inconvenience. The cases where officers have proved unfaithful to their duty have been few.

The beneficiaries of our state charities have, under the good administration of that department, steadily diminished in number, except in the case of the insane. The increase among these is not believed to be due to an increase of insanity among our people, but rather to an accumulation of persons mentally affected, resulting in part from the very abundance of accommodation for them. More room for these must soon be made, but not perhaps necessarily at your session. I trust that, both as a matter of treatment and economy, some other plan will be adopted than that of erecting another costly hospital like the last. It is desirable that there should be a more intelligent classification of the insane, instead of herding them all together. I see no reason why, taking some of our state or county buildings, which I understand are available for the purpose, separate provision should not be made, for instance, for the criminal insane, a hundred of whom, perhaps, could now be collected apart, thus humanely and justly relieving the others from what they and their friends rightly feel to be a reproach and a constant personal danger, and also relieving the growing pressure of numbers to be provided for in present quarters. I am advised that this classification should be made at an early date. It is also true that among the insane poor, are many epileptic patients. Their presence in our hospitals disturbs the discipline and treatment of the ordinary insane; and they might well be placed in a separate establishment, not at present, but whenever a sufficient number shall warrant. Other classifications suggest themselves, after all of which, however, the great body still remains to fill our hospitals. In the treatment of them the tendency is toward less and less restraint, both as a matter of personal right and of cure. An insane man is not often a criminal, and is entitled to personal freedom except so far as restraint is necessary for keeping himself from harm, and others from intolerable annoyance or danger.

Certainly in our asylums there are great numbers of inmates, especially among the chronic insane, needing mainly the oversight of a friend, harmless, and differing in no respect from those patients at private retreats, who are allowed almost unrestricted liberty, and who are rather boarders than anything else. If these could be transferred from our present asylums as circumstances shall warrant or require, room would be made for the cases that necessitate more restraint, as well as for the increasing needs of the future. It is worth considering whether the system, which promises to be so successful, of finding cheap and good boarding-places for young children now at the state primary school could not be applied also to the harmless insane. Many of these are able to labor, and would derive benefit from employment. Many patients of this class have been thus removed from hospitals in former years; and the same policy might now be further extended, as is done in Scotland and other countries. In that case, every needful safeguard should be provided against abuse or neglect of this helpless class. Or, if the numbers increase so that the State should still itself prefer to board them, it could do so in cheap, wholesome tenements, and in the simplest atmosphere of inexpensive and comfortable homes. In either case there must of course be regular visitation and medical oversight. But such a policy would dispense with unnecessary attendance in the cases which need it least, and permit an increase of attendance for those violent insane, with whom also mechanical restraints should assume the place of a helping hand as little as possible. Contrary to what was the prevailing opinion twenty-five years ago, it is now coming to be agreed by the best experts, that the recent and presumably curable insane should not be crowded together with the chronic and incurable in great hospitals, where the very air seems charged with the hopelessness of a madhouse. Connected with this change of opinion is the suggestion, lately made to me, that, if it shall come to the erection of new buildings, these should be small hospitals, where the curables could have every available appliance for their recovery; while, for the incurables, buildings, such as I have already referred to, constructed at no great expense, would be found sufficient to meet any exigency for some years to come. From all the information that has come to me, it seems that the laws for the commitment and detention of the insane are better understood and more carefully administered than ever before. I commend to your attention the recommendations of the board of health, lunacy and charity upon this and other important subjects with which it deals. With regard to the board itself, I trust you will make no change. It embraces two or three subdivisions, formerly kept apart, yet closely affiliated and independent. Its work has been well done, and it is hardly worth while to try a new experiment every year or two in the mere form of the central supervision of the interests now intrusted to its charge. I am persuaded that the change of 1879 was rather one of form than of substance, and that any further change, or change back, would be the same.



